Sharing the Word of God at Home

On the popular public television program *Antiques Roadshow*, people from around the country bring their treasures to be appraised by various experts. An antique might be a cherished family heirloom displayed proudly in a prominent place in the home, or a long-forgotten trinket gathering dust on a shelf in the attic. Whatever the item, the owner is usually surprised to hear the expert's comments. The appraiser might put a low price tag on something the owner thought had great value. And what was originally purchased for a few dollars sometimes turns out to be a prized collector's item now valued at thousands of dollars.

Take a look around your home. What is your family's most valued possession? Is it an object, a person, a relationship? How does your family express delight and pride in this treasured possession?

The Second Vatican Council teaches that "the treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly so that a richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God's Word" (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* [*Sacrosanctum Concilium*], no. 51, in *Vatican Council II: Volume 1: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, new rev. ed., ed. Austin Flannery [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996]). Do we consider the Bible a treasure, a special table around which the family gathers? Is the family Bible among your home's most valuable possessions? As we consider practical ways to share the Word of God at home, perhaps we will be surprised to discover that the family Bible, regardless of whether it is prominently displayed or is gathering dust on an attic shelf, is one of the most valuable spiritual treasures in a Christian home.

A Living and Effective Word

"Indeed, the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern the reflections and thoughts of the heart," writes the author of the Letter to the Hebrews (4:12). God's Word is "living and effective" because we welcome it, in the words of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd ed.), "not as a human word, 'but as what it really is, the word of God'" ([Washington, DC: Libreria Editrice Vaticana–United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2000], no. 104, quoting 1 Thes 2:13).

But how is the Word of God to become "living and effective" in our homes, in our families, in our professional and social relationships? Here are a few practical ways to make the treasures of the Bible into a table at which your family is nourished and strengthened for the Christian life.

Reading, Reflecting, Renewing

Begin to break open God's Word in your home by dedicating some family time each week for a brief reading of a Scripture passage, perhaps the Sunday Gospel. Given the hectic and stressed pace of life and our typically overworked schedules, making family time for the Bible reminds us of the need to put God first. Gathering around the table of God's Word enriches and strengthens the experience of family as a "domestic Church."

Choose a comfortable and quiet place in the home, away from the distractions of television and ringing telephones. Read the passage aloud, and then allow some time for the family to reflect on and share its meaning together. Since Sacred Scripture is the "speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit" (CCC, no. 81, quoting Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*, no. 9), this time dedicated to reading puts your family into living communication with God. Remind everyone gathered that this family activity brings them to a living encounter with Christ, who is present as the Word among them.

Practical Resources

In recent years Catholic Bible study resources have become more readily available. Choose a study aid that is user-friendly and suited to the ages of children in the family. Rely on those resources as aids, not as substitutes, for reading the words of Scripture itself.

No resource, however well written, can replace reading God's Word.

Introduce children to the *New American Bible, revised edition* (NABRE) translation of the Sacred Scriptures once they receive First Holy Communion. While the *New American Bible* was not translated with children specifically in mind, it is the basis of the readings proclaimed at Mass. This relationship of the *New American Bible* to the liturgy means it is invaluable for affirming children in the faith of the Church: it allows them to make the connection between what is proclaimed and heard in the liturgy with what is read in the home.

Parents with young children are encouraged to include as many Bible stories as possible in a child's library and to devote time to reading and discussing the rich levels of meaning in the sacred stories. When children, with their natural capacity for awe and wonder, marvel at the biblical stories, they can be led to connect the story of their life and their family to the story of salvation itself. Biblical stories and figures who reveal human weakness and sinfulness provide opportunities to discuss, at age-appropriate levels, the realities of human experience in the light of God's love and mercy.

Praying the Scriptures with the Church

Couples and parents with children can also choose to integrate family prayer time with the reading of Scripture. The Liturgy of the Hours is biblical in content and inspirational through and through. So when praying the Liturgy of the Hours as a family, whether Morning or Evening Prayer, your family participates in the common and universal prayer of the Church. Again, several handy resources are available to make the daily praying of Morning and Evening Prayer simple and sustainable.

Another practical way to break open God's Word in the home is through the practice of *lectio divina.* This ancient Christian practice is being recovered in our time, and it was particularly encouraged by the 2008 Synod of Bishops on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church. Through a series of steps—reading, meditation, contemplation, and prayer—*lectio divina* allows the Word of God to bear rich spiritual fruit in the lives of the faithful. Your family can also experience the riches of God's Word by adapting this ancient approach to a meditative and prayerful reading of Scripture in the home. Several handy resources, in print and online, explain the steps of *lectio divina* with practical adaptations for the family. A good place to start is the article "Ever Ancient, Ever New: The Art and Practice of *Lectio Divina,*" (see National Bible Week webpage).

Another often overlooked source for praying with Scripture is the variety of traditional Catholic prayers, such as the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and the Rosary. These prayers, being rooted in the Bible, can help families contemplate the wisdom of Scripture and the life of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels.

Finally, one practical way to make the Scriptures come alive is to assign a family member to gather artistic images that convey and express the biblical themes of a particular Scripture passage. Let a painting, sculpture, stained glass, or piece of sacred music serve as a reference point for reflection on God's Word as it takes artistic form in the Christian tradition.

From Hearing to Living God's Word

The lives of the saints are filled with examples of holy men and women who have translated God's Word into action. In fact, one could say that the life of a saint is like a good Bible commentary. The saints stand out because of their unique and graced capacity to be not only hearers but doers of God's Word (see Jas 1:22). In the faith, hope, and love of the saints, God's Word—recorded in the pages of the Bible—comes alive in the book of life.

Take St. Augustine, bishop and doctor of the Church, and the powerful story of his conversion. In the twelfth chapter of book eight of his *Confessions*, Augustine recounts a turning point in his life as he tearfully struggles with his personal and intellectual past. While sitting in a garden, he heard the voice of a child chanting over and over again, "Take it and read, take it and read." Turning to pick up a Bible that he had set down only moments earlier, he read a passage from the writings of St. Paul that called him away from the life he once led. He goes on to write, "I had no wish to read more and no need to do so. For in an instant, as I came to the end of the sentence, it was as though the light of confidence flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled" (trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin [London: Penguin Books, 1961], 177-178). The rest of Augustine's life and work was spent living out the meaning of God's word.

Feeding Your Family Food for the Soul

Recent surveys have shown that few Catholics read the Bible on their own or as a family. But what better place is there to encounter the person of Jesus Christ than in God's Word? As St. Jerome once noted, "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ."

The Church continually invites us to return to God's Word. For when we pray with the Bible—personally and in our homes—our encounter with the living Word of God is not a mere intellectual exercise but a spiritually nourishing feast. As we find ways to share God's Word in our homes we will experience firsthand what the Second Vatican Council means in *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* (*Dei Verbum*) when it states that "in the sacred books the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children, and talks with them. And such is the force and power of the Word of God that it can serve the Church as her support and vigor, and the children of the Church as strength for their faith, food for the soul, and a pure and lasting fount of spiritual life" (no. 21, in Flannery).

This resource is adapted from an article by Dr. Jem Sullivan, originally written for Catechetical Sunday 2009.

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